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BRAZIL

Orlando GEISEL

Minister of the Army

Head of the pivotal Army Ministry in the government of President Emílio Garrastazú Médici since November 1969, Gen. (ret.) Orlando Geisel is one of the most powerful men in Brazil. Through the force of his personality and professional competence, Geisel has brought firm leadership to the army [redacted]



(1972)

He is also one of the President's four or five closest advisers. General Geisel was a strong presidential contender in the succession crises of September-October 1969 following the sudden incapacitating illness of then President Arthur da Costa e Silva, and he is still mentioned as a future presidential possibility.

In spite of the glare of national scrutiny under which he works, Geisel's attitudes remain obscure and elude neat categorization. The general is intimately involved in national decisionmaking, but he has retained an apolitical, professional military image. A celebrated military intellectual who might be expected to hold liberal views, he has nevertheless become a voice for those officers who espouse hardline military government policies. As Army Minister he has denounced "romantic democracy" and praised Brazil's present "democracy" based on "freedom with responsibility."

#### As Army Minister

When Médici came to power in October 1969, he wanted Geisel as his Vice President but considered him too competent (and too powerful) for the job. In November 1969 he appointed Geisel to the post of Army Minister, a strategic and powerful position uniquely suited to his interests and abilities.

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Upon his appointment an article in the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* stated "Gen. Orlando Geisel assumes responsibility for controlling all of the vast machinery that has been mobilized to insure the national security."

As Minister, Geisel is in firm control of the army and coordinates many police and military anti-subversive programs. Since assuming his new post he has been credited with renewing army-wide emphasis upon training (his pet project) and challenging the antiquated system of army factories that produce essentially civilian goods. Bound to the division concept, he initially objected to the incremental reorganization of the Brazilian Army along brigade lines, but he has since yielded to the majority opinion of the army officers.

Geisel retired from active military duty a month after he entered the government, although he still wears his uniform. He has since adopted a more centrist position in the declining "Sorbonne Group" versus "hardliner" policy debates. In his new neutralist role he has communicated to the President the views of hardline officers on such matters as military government, youth problems and Church-state relations.

Geisel, who served as assistant military attaché in Washington from 1950 to 1952,

On the one hand, he is proud of his attendance in 1945 at the US Army Command and General Staff School in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where he graduated high in his class. He has also materially aided the activities of the Joint Brazil-US Military Commission in Rio de Janeiro. He regularly attends functions sponsored by the US military attaché.

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On the other hand, Geisel is a nationalist who favors "Brazilian solutions for Brazilian problems," and he doubts Brazil's need for extensive foreign advice or military purchases.

In late 1967 and again in March 1972 Geisel threatened to cancel all Brazilian participation in the US Military Assistance Program (MAP)-sponsored training and to slow down or stop the travel to the United States of Brazilian military personnel. In 1968 he was instrumental in ending the permanent United States military presence in Recife and on Fernando de Noronha Island. In addition, he almost certainly had some responsibility for the cancellation in 1972 of the scheduled trip to the United States of the senior class of the Army Command and General Staff School, after the US Congress had imposed a worldwide ten percent cash deposit requirement on MAP purchases.

#### Early Life and Career

Of German ancestry, Orlando Geisel was born on 5 September 1905 in Estrêla, Rio Grande do Sul. He entered the Military Academy as a cadet in 1923. During the course of his military career he attended the School of Arms intelligence course in 1931; the artillery advanced course in 1936; the US Army Command and General Staff School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1944; and the Brazilian Superior War College in 1964.

Prior to 1947 Geisel held various artillery posts. Between 1947 and the 1964 revolution he held the following significant positions: staff member, Armed Forces General Staff; chief, Training Section, Army General Staff; Chief of Staff, 1st Army; chief, Executive Office (*Gabinete*) of Minister of War; and director of engineering matériel, Directorate General of Ordnance.

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With the Revolution

Geisel is thoroughly committed to the political principles of the military revolution of 1964. When left-leaning President (September 1961-April 1964) João Goulart was overthrown, Geisel was attending the Brazilian Superior War College, the philosophical command post of the revolution. Strongly anti-Goulart and anti-Communist, Geisel became associated with the "Sorbonne Group"--a loose coalition of liberal military intellectuals comprised of faculty members and students of the Superior War College who supported the policies of Marshal Humberto de Alencar Castello Branco, who succeeded Goulart and served as President from April 1964 to March 1967.

Because of his whole-hearted support for the revolution, Geisel's career continued to advance under the Castello Branco military government. In November 1965 he was promoted to full general. Returning to command positions after the revolution, Geisel eventually assumed command of the important Brazilian 3d Army in May 1966. In December 1966 he was sworn in as Army Chief of Staff. The reassignment was ostensibly a promotion but it triggered a semi-eclipse of his hitherto brilliant military career.

Geisel's career received another blow when Marshal Costa e Silva became President in March 1967. Geisel remained closely tied to the Castello Branco and "Sorbonne Group" philosophy. Costa e Silva's political policies were more hardline and nationalist. Geisel was retained as Army Chief of Staff, but he remained out of step with the new regime and was considered by many to be a "has been."

In April 1968 Geisel [redacted] become Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff (EMFA). Like the Army Chief of Staff, the Chief of the EMFA is not a legal member of the Army High

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Command and does not occupy an army billet. Furthermore, in 1968 the EMFA was primarily concerned with the relatively innocuous problems of joint logistics, planning and exercises.

#### Return to Graces and Power

Gradually, Geisel gained the favor of President Costa e Silva, and a satisfactory dialogue developed between the two men.

For example, Geisel adopted a moderate position during the governmental crisis of 12-13 December 1968 that resulted in the issuance of Institutional Act Five (establishing stronger executive powers). He supported the Act, but he did not take part in the surreptitious nocturnal meetings of military extremists who demanded even more resolute government action. General Geisel also favorably impressed Costa e Silva by promptly complying with a presidential directive to move the EMFA from Rio de Janeiro to Brasília. The move resulted in placing Geisel in physical propinquity to the President, and under Geisel's leadership the EMFA became an important adjunct of the Presidency.

#### Personal Data

A competent troop leader, Geisel seems to thrive in school or command environments, and his independent and methodical intellect seems best adapted to hierarchical organization.

As Chief of Staff he did not adapt well to a position that carried no particular control over the army, which remained under the authority of the Army Minister and the separate army commanders.

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[redacted] the general is respected by all for his high moral principles and his intellect. He is most apt to respond to an argument based on reason, logic and Brazil's self-interest.

Geisel speaks good English and Spanish and some German and French, in addition to his native Portuguese.

Family

Geisel comes from a family of outstanding military officers. His oldest brother is Maj. Gen. (ret.) Henrique Geisel. A younger brother, Gen. (ret.) Ernesto Geisel, is currently serving as president of Petrobrás, the national oil monopoly.

A Roman Catholic, Geisel is married to the former Alzira Torres and is the father of two children, Augusto Guilherme and Lydia. As of 1966 Augusto was the director of the Brazil-US Institute in Niterói.

January 1973

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